

forgotten war in Afghanistan—the largely forgotten war in Afghanistan—continues to grind on and on and on more than a year and a half after the United States roused the Taliban from power and obliterated al Qaeda's terrorist training camps. Nearly 10,000 American troops remain in Afghanistan, with no end—no end—to their mission in sight—and no clear mission to accomplish—hunting the remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaida organizations. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein's sons have been killed, and one can only hope that we are closing in on Saddam Hussein himself, but in the wider war on terrorism, Osama bin Laden remains at large, and his organization continues to spread its venom throughout the Middle East and perhaps the world.

The alert issued earlier this week by the Homeland Security Department is only the latest reminder that the al-Qaida terrorist network remains a potent threat to America and its allies. The warning included specific details—such as the fact that targets might include the East Coast of the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, or Australia and it raised the possibility that at least one of the planned hijackings or bombings could be executed before the end of the summer.

In the face of such a frightening specter, it is somewhat unsettling that on the subject of terrorism, the President is talking tough to Iran and Syria, but he seldom mentions Osama bin Laden anymore.

Is this another example of the President's efforts to change his message to divert the attention of the American people, the people who are watching through those electronic eyes above the Chair's desk? The imminent and direct threat of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction was used to hoodwink the public into accepting the rush to war, but now that no weapons have been found, the President barely mentions them anymore. Instead, he is now talking about how regime change in Iraq was really the catalyst required to stabilize the Middle East. New day, new message.

At the center of America's imperiled relations with its friends and foes alike is the Bush doctrine of preemption, which was first articulated in the September 2002 National Security Strategy. This unprecedented declaration that the United States has the right to launch preemptive military attacks against hostile nations in the absence of direct provocation sent shockwaves throughout the international community.

The doctrine of preemption was the justification for attacking Iraq without provocation, but the ramifications of the policy go far beyond that nation. All so-called "rogue regimes" were put on notice that the United States was prepared to act to deter the development of weapons of mass destruction that could be used against America.

Suddenly, the elite club of nations that formed the President's "axis of

evil" found itself caught in the cross hairs of the U.S. military. And just as quickly, the hollowness of the doctrine was exposed. Iraq could be attacked at will because it did not have nuclear capability. North Korea called for restraint because it plausibly did have nuclear capability. Iran was a question mark. Predictably, both North Korea and Iran, seeing the writing on the wall, began to scramble to accelerate their nuclear programs. In retrospect, the doctrine of preemption is beginning to look more and more like a doctrine of provocation.

Against this background, the storm clouds of international instability are massing. America's military forces are stretched thin in Iraq and Afghanistan. Our military leadership is absorbed with Iraq. Our military resources, both financial and personnel, are strained to the breaking point. With the exception of Britain, our allies are reluctant to commit significant resources or manpower to an operation in Iraq in which the United States has a stranglehold on authority and decision-making. The executive branch is preoccupied with the occupation of Iraq and seems paralyzed when it comes to meaningful action to deal with North Korea or Iran or Liberia. Afghanistan and the global war on terror have seemingly been relegated to the status of afterthoughts. America's foreign policy appears to be adrift in an increasingly tumultuous sea of international turmoil. Meanwhile, the national terror threat continues to hover uneasily in the "elevated range" amid new warnings of terrorist attacks being plotted against commercial aircraft.

In this moment of great potential peril, the President is preparing to retire for a month to his ranch in Texas. The question needs to be asked: Who's minding the White House?

In a short time, the Senate will recess for the month of August. I do not think we should go very far. I hope that the international situation will remain stable, and that no new crises will erupt. But I do not pretend to be sanguine. I do not pretend to assume that all will be well.

A rare combination of volatile and dangerous international events are poised to converge in the coming months. In large part, it is a storm of this administration's own making, fueled by the fear, confusion, and instability caused by the unprecedented and ill-advised doctrine of preemption. I only hope that the President and his advisers can summon the skill, the wit, and the leadership to engage and attempt to tame the elements of international turmoil before it is too late and we are swept up into the vortex of the storm.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ALLARD). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. FRIST. Members, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SEPTEMBER IN THE SENATE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, shortly I will make a statement addressing some of the accomplishments we have been able to achieve over the last several weeks—indeed, over the last 6 or 7 months—and, at the same time, a note to my colleagues about the future. Most are thinking about getting on airplanes and going home or around the world now or this afternoon. It is important over the August recess, from the Senate standpoint and staff standpoint, that people begin working in preparation for our return in early September.

I mentioned early this morning, most of September will be spent on the appropriations bills. We have been very successful in addressing four of those appropriations bills to date; we have nine to address in the next several weeks. After discussion with the Appropriations Committee and the leadership in the Senate and many colleagues, the first appropriations bill in September will be the Labor, HHS, and Education appropriations bill. We will start that right off the bat coming back from this recess. Under the leadership of Chairman SPECTER, we have made huge progress in this regard.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—H.R. 2660

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, at this juncture, I ask unanimous consent that at 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday, September 2, the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 197, H.R. 2660, the Labor, HHS, and Education appropriations bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I will yield to my distinguished colleague who will be managing this very important piece of legislation, someone who has worked very aggressively, very diligently in this regard and who I am confident will lead the Senate in addressing these important issues in a timely, efficient, and expeditious way upon our return.

I yield a few minutes to Chairman SPECTER.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished majority leader for his generous comments. I thank him, further, for listing the appropriations bill for Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education immediately on our return on September 2.

I have conferred with the ranking member of the Democrats, Senator HARKIN, about our plan for managing the bill, and have conferred beyond that with Senator BYRD, the ranking